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COMPARATIVE STRATEGY
VOLUME 1, NUMBERS 1 AND 2-1978

Book Review

Heinrich Hoehne, *Wilhelm Canaris* (Muenchen: Bertelsmann) 1976; 607 pages. English translation to be published in 1978 by Doubleday.

Heinrich Hoehne, editor of the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* and student of modern German history, continues his canvassing of Hitler's Germany with a book on Wilhelm Canaris, the enigmatic chief of the German military intelligence organization, the *Abwehr*, during the years of the Third Reich. The book, an English edition of which will soon be published in the United States, successfully helps penetrate the legend and mystery of Admiral Canaris, who became one of the leading opponents of Hitler within the regime. Dismissed as head of the *Abwehr* in February, 1944, he was arrested shortly after the assassination attempt on Hitler in July of that year and executed by the Gestapo in April of 1945. It has been easy to sympathize with Canaris, for while he vacillated and was, perhaps, not the most effective opponent of Hitler, he paid for his opposition with his life. Sympathy for Canaris has grown as attacks on him by resurgent right-wingers have been mounted. In a paroxysm of hatred, they have equated his opposition to Hitler with treason: allegedly it was he who betrayed plans of attack to Germany's enemies; he who sabotaged Spain's entry into the war on Germany's side; and he who led the internal opposition to Hitler.

Most intriguing about the book, however, and the main reason why it claims our attention today, is not the fascinating story of Canaris himself, but the strange similarity between the *Abwehr's* ailments during the 1930s and 1940s and the alleged weaknesses of the U.S. intelligence community which gave rise to the spate of investigations in the mid-1970s. Take, for example, the accusation of excessive romanticism in the spy business and the James Bond cult that supposedly dominates the clandestine service, which in turn is said to dominate the CIA. Hoehne finds that Canaris' *Abwehr* was governed by a similar cult, based on a belief that the destiny of nations and governments depends largely on the invisible workings of cunning agents and effective intelligence services. Hoehne's description of the organizational insufficiencies of the *Abwehr* reads like a recital of the accusations made against the U.S. intelligence apparatus. Rapid expansion of the *Abwehr* produced a gargantuan organization that often merely spun its wheels. It employed more case officers than agents, and the education and performance level of these case officers were dismally deficient. In the field stations, the situation was even worse, with routine intelligence rituals producing rigor mortis. Stations were often the arenas for acting out personal vanities, were victimized by intelligence swindlers, or became mere paper mills.

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Too many *Abwehr* officers and agents were integrated into diplomatic posts abroad and there were constant jurisdictional disputes and squabbles with ambassadors on coordinating intelligence operations so as to assure that they reflected German foreign policy objectives in a particular country. The ambassadors were often unhappy with the *Abwehr's* reporting, which duplicated, they felt, the reporting of the embassy's diplomats. It is noteworthy that it was not the maneuverings of the sinister SS and SD that finally led to the demise of Canaris, but a dispute with the German ambassador in Spain over the jurisdiction and duties of the *Abwehr* station.

In the current debate over the U.S. intelligence community, the issue of collection vs. analysis is central. A bitter dispute raged between the intelligence collectors in the *Abwehr* and the analyst-evaluators of the various military services in Germany. The G-2 of Eastern Front's General Staff *Fremde Heere Ost* was forever complaining of the miserable quality of the *Abwehr* reports and, in general, was hypercritical of the intelligence service. Elitist staff officers looked down condescendingly on the usually less educated *Abwehr* intelligence officers. As a result, there was a constant threat that the military attaches might form their own intelligence networks so that the Army would not be dependent solely on *Abwehr* reporting.

In the end, the *Abwehr* was taken over by an ambitious, youthful, and ruthless SS seeking a unified intelligence service under its own aegis. It was not the preponderance of the SS, however, but rather the failures of the *Abwehr* that made this demise inevitable.

As Hoehne demonstrates, nearly every major event was accompanied by a major *Abwehr* failure, from the time of the Rhineland Occupation in 1935, when false reporting by Canaris' agents indicated that the British and French general staffs had a unified action plan in case the Germans marched into the Rhineland, to the faulty *Abwehr* reports which led to a misunderstanding of the background of the inner-Soviet crisis during the Stalin purges of 1937, to the inability of the intelligence service throughout the years of the war to supply accurate information on enemy troops strengths, dispositions, and plans. When the *Abwehr* failed to anticipate the Anzio landings in January, 1944, Hitler ordered an investigation of the intelligence gaffe, and within a month issued the order that abolished the *Abwehr*.

Worse than the failures obvious at the time, however, were the things the *Abwehr* did not even know about. In the UK, the entire German network was turned around. All information reaching the *Abwehr* from its agents there actually was spoon-fed by British intelligence. In the U.S., eight saboteurs were arrested upon their arrival. *Abwehr*-sponsored uprisings in South Africa, Afghanistan, India, and the Caucasus all failed.

As Hoehne points out, Canaris did not know and never learned that heads of intelligence services are, in the first instance, bureaucrats. He fought the same battle of spy versus bureaucrat which has been the theme during the investigation of the U.S. intelligence community.

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The similarities between the inner workings of the *Abwehr* and the *modus operandi* of the CIA prompt a compelling question: is there an intrinsic quality about intelligence organizations the world over that causes them to perceive their missions in essentially the same way and that leads them to carry out those missions in pretty much an identical fashion, whatever the nation they happen to be serving? Does national culture, tradition, heritage, and the given national political infrastructure have very little bearing on the role and performance of an intelligence organization? How otherwise could two countries as different in terms of historical development (a difference that was strongly accentuated by the Nazi dictatorship) give rise to intelligence organizations that—in terms of performance—were mirror images of each other. One simple explanation is that by their very nature, intelligence organizations operate without proper safeguards or supervision and draw to themselves the type of operators that thrive in this climate. It is this frightening theory that merits further investigation by those who study the role of intelligence organizations in a free society.

Gerold Guensberg

Now a free-lance writer on current political problems, Gerold Guensberg was a CIA officer for 25 years until his recent retirement.